

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

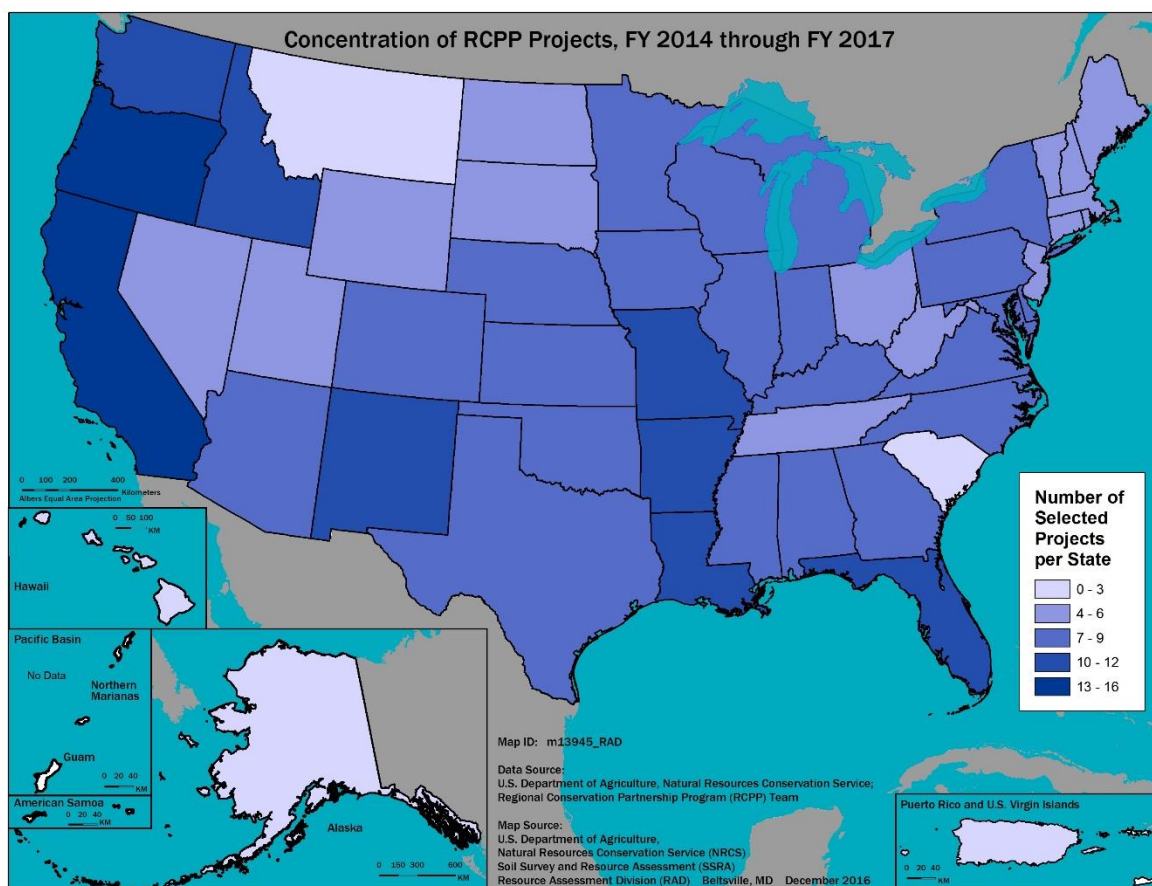
Investing in New Mexico



Regional Conservation Partnership Program

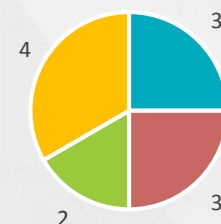
Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven, locally-led approach to conservation. It offers new opportunities for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to harness innovation, welcome new partners to the conservation mission, and demonstrates the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation.

In 2017, NRCS is investing up to \$225 million in 88 projects that impact every state in the nation, including five in New Mexico. Since 2014, NRCS has invested more than \$825 million in 286 high-impact projects, bringing together more than 2,000 conservation partners who have invested an additional \$1.4 billion. By 2018, NRCS and partners will have invested at least \$2.4 billion. These projects are leading to cleaner and more abundant water, better soil and air quality, enhance wildlife habitat, more resilient and productive agricultural lands and stronger rural economies.



New Mexico Projects to Date

Projects by Resource Concern



- Soil Health
- Water Quality
- Degraded Plant Condition
- Water Quantity/Drought

12
Projects

\$32.43
million

NRCS Investment

160
Partners

Existing RCPP Projects

Year	Title	Funding Pool	Lead Partner	Number of Partners	NRCS Investment
2016	Innovative Tribal Conservation and GHG Management	National	Intertribal Agriculture Council	9	\$1.8 million
2016	NM Acequia Revitalization on Historic Lands	State	New Mexico Acequia Association, NM Interstate Stream Commission, and NM Association of Conservation Districts	10	\$3 million
2016	North Central NM Watershed Restoration Project	State	Claunch-Pinto SWCD	15	\$500,000
2014/2015	Canadian River Watershed Restoration Project (CRWRP)	CCA	Canadian River Riparian Restoration Project	18	\$2 million
2014/2015	New Mexico Acequia Revitalization on Historic Irrigated Lands (NMAR)	State	New Mexico Acequia Association, New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, and New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts	10	\$1 million
2014/2015	North Central New Mexico Watershed Restoration Project	State	Claunch-Pinto SWCD	17	\$2.4 million
2014/2015	New Mexico Restoration Initiative for Rangeland, Forestland, and Wildlife on Ranches with Federal Lands (NMRI)	National	New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts	18	\$4 million

2017 RCPP Projects

Canadian River Watershed Restoration Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,600,000 (Critical Conservation Area – Prairie Grasslands Region)

Lead Partner: Canadian River Riparian Restoration Project

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

Canadian River Watershed Restoration Project will encourage ranchers and landowners operating within the Prairie Grasslands Region of New Mexico to utilize the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Each participating rancher, in collaboration with federal and state land managing agencies, will develop a resource management plan. The leveraged EQIP funds will encourage restoration efforts outlined in the plan, like treating invasive plant species. Partners within the CRWRP have been addressing resource concerns on ranches with mixed ownership lands for 11 years. This project was initiated when eight Soil and Water Conservation Districts encompassing the entire Canadian River Watershed began collaboration through a Joint Powers Agreement to restore the watershed of the Canadian River and its tributaries.



New Mexico Range and Forest Soil Health Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$7,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts

Number of Initial Partners: 17

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

The New Mexico Range and Forest Soil Health Initiative will bring Environmental Quality Incentives Program and partner funds together for New Mexico ranchers whose operations include federal lands. Each rancher, state and federal agency with lands included in the ranch operation will develop a coordinator resource management plan or CRMP. The CRMP will include range and forest soil health restoration strategies, such as forest thinning, to combat the increase in wildland fires. New Mexico experienced over 1.5 million acres in wildfires from 2009 to 2014. Restoration efforts through this initiative are critical to fund treatments on over 20 million acres of brush-invaded rangeland and 10 million acres of overstocked forest lands.

Building Resiliency in the San Juan-Rio Chama Region

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,250,000 (National)

Lead Partner: East Rio Arriba Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 21

Participating States: Colorado and New Mexico (Lead State)

Completed by the Bureau of Reclamation in 1976, the San Juan-Rio Chama Diversion is a series of diversion structures and tunnels that together carry runoff 26 miles across the Continental Divide from the Colorado River watershed to the Rio Chama, in the Rio Grande watershed. This diversion, along with the Rio Chama, provides approximately one third of New Mexico's water supply for irrigators, agriculture, industry, communities and fish and wildlife. The Building Resiliency in the San Juan-Rio Chama Region project, managed by East Rio Arriba Soil and Water Conservation District and twenty partners, will complement recent diversion structures with additional forest health and watershed treatments to increase the resiliency of the landscape to withstand stressors such as drought, wildfire and climate change in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. Between 2017 and 2021, partners in the San Juan-Rio Chama region of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico will complete 1,000 – 1,500 acres of watershed resiliency treatments per year utilizing \$6.4 million of Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and the Agricultural Easement Program.

New Mexico Acequia Revitalization on Historic Lands

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2,907,670 (State)

Lead Partner: NM Association of Conservation Districts, NM Interstate Stream Commission, NM Acequia Association

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

New Mexico has a rich history of community acequias supporting agriculture. Approximately 800 acequias and community ditch associations serve many farmers or "parciantes" who make all, or part of their livelihood from farming and ranching. Farms served by acequias range in size from less than 1 acre to over 500 acres. The majority of farmers depending on acequias are minorities in underserved communities. Acequias are located in 12 of the most impoverished counties in the state. In New Mexico we say "agua es la vida" (water is life). This project will help sustain this critical social and spiritual connection as a matter of social and environmental justice. The objective of the proposal is to facilitate and promote surface water conservation, increase irrigation system efficiencies/effectiveness and improve water quality on agricultural lands and for downstream purposes. Critical riparian habitats for dependent wildlife and plant species will be conserved. Water quantity and quality will be improved by restoring historic acequias on agricultural lands supporting local families and communities. Traditional acequias in irrigated valleys of northern

New Mexico provide multiple hydrological benefits including, aquifer recharge, temporary reservoir storage, and delayed return flow. Recent studies indicate that hydrologic functions of traditional acequia systems prolong the river runoff hydrograph, save water through reduced transpiration loss from ground water storage in comparison to above ground storage, while ameliorating climatic variation on local and regional water users. Some aspects of the traditional acequia system resemble natural hydrologic processes and mitigate altered hydrologic characteristics. These altered characteristics include stream channelization and flood control structures. Irrigation via acequias provides functions similar to overbank flooding and meandering streams. A coordinated/collaborative effort with the Interstate Stream Commission and the New Mexico Acequia Association throughout the entire planning and implementation process will serve as the basis for program implementation.

North Central NM Watershed Restoration Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: 969,220 (State)

Lead Partner: Claunh-Pinto SWCD

Number of Initial Partners: 11

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

This is a regional watershed project aimed at reducing wildfire risk while at the same time improving soils, hydrology, vegetation, and enhancing social/economic needs. The watershed approach provides a framework for coordinating project needs among private landowners, state and Federal agencies, tribes, communities, and other interested stakeholders. The project extends from Taos (North) to Bernardo (South) and Gallup (West) to Santa Rosa (East), including all major tributaries and sub-watersheds of the Rio Grande and Pecos River in that region. This project will expand on previous work with established partners to improve the natural resources of this critically important region. Forest restoration practices have been shown to reduce high-severity wildfire and to improve watershed health, water quality, and water quantity. Poor historic management of forest watersheds and riparian zones along with current and forecast climate change are creating a dire situation for the condition and availability of New Mexico's forest, rangeland and water resources. This situation must be alleviated with natural resource restoration efforts. Montane coniferous forest watersheds and riparian areas that experience extensive mid- and high-severity wildfires have greatly diminished water storage capacity because the soils do not absorb or hold water after fire. Rainwater runoff generated during storms has the potential to cause extreme flooding, sedimentation, and debris flows into the main tributaries of the burned watersheds. The large amounts of post-fire sediment that move into rivers, streams and reservoirs during these flood events diminish water quality and disrupt water delivery and storage. Wildlife, acequias, rural economies, tourism and outdoor recreation are all at risk from the associated impacts of watershed wildfires. Without a large-scale watershed solution addressing wildfire, more acres will continue to be severely impacted, which will place critical water and other natural resources in jeopardy, and threaten more communities within the Wildland Urban Environment (WUI).